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ABSTRACT

Acting as a team, a graduate research methods class at Florida State University studied a first-year imaginative writing course, "Writing from Life," designed to help students write autobiography, fiction, and poetry. In the course of this study, intriguing differences became apparent between the attitudes and approaches in this class and those in the alternative course for first-year students, writing about literature. Like most of the faculty and administrators associated with the course, the teacher of imaginative writing and her students believed that this was the course for the more serious students. Rather than "taking the bus"--writing about literature--they were taking a fun ride in a little sports car. Their instructor ran what the researchers called a "initiatory, maternal workshop." In other words, she took on the role of a master writer who helps the novice or apprentice learn the role of the creative writer, and she did so in a supportive and affirming mode. In an interview, the instructor explained that she considered her students "emotionally engaged"; they were young writers, artists. Her class structure reflected her respect for the students: no grades were assigned to individual papers; they prepared a portfolio instead. Such findings raise the following questions: why are writing about literature and creative writing taught so differently? why should the structure of one be more rigid than the other? (Handouts include course syllabi and researchers' comments.) (TB)

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ED 376 493

Nancy L. Reichert

NCTE Conference

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Defining and Redefining Boundaries in the Creative Writing Workshop

In the spring of 1992, I signed up for a research methods class with Wendy Bishop, a professor at Florida State University. On the first day I found out that our class of eight would act as a research team for the rest of the semester in order to conduct an ethnographic study of the Enc 1142, First-Year Imaginative Writing courses, specifically Ann Turkle's "Writing From Life" class--a course concerned with the writing of autobiography, poetry, and fiction. My immediate response was a mixture of uncertainty and curiosity--I wasn't too sure what ethnographic study was, but I had always been interested in the role that the Imaginative Writing courses play at FSU, and I knew Ann Turkle to be an experienced teacher and writer.

I already knew that a limited number of Imaginative Writing courses were offered to first-year students as alternatives to the traditional second semester first-year writing course, 1102, Writing about Literature. These courses were usually taught as creative writing workshops by graduate students in FSU's creative writing program. From what I could tell, they were quite popular with the students. In the spring of 1992 fourteen imaginative writing courses taught by 10 graduate students were offered, and all filled quite quickly--as usual.

As our study progressed, I began to understand ethnography and the research team began to grow more interested in our study. As we

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interviewed administrators, teachers and students and acted as participant observers in Ann Turkle's classroom, we began to see what appeared to be clear and distinct boundaries between the way Imaginative Writing classrooms were structured and the way Writing About Literature classrooms were structured. The questions that began to drive my interest in this study were 1) How do the administrators and teachers we interviewed and observed in our study define and structure creative writing courses, and 2) Why are these courses defined and structured so differently from our traditional, second semester course? Shouldn't these two writing courses share more similarities than differences?

Our interviews, our classroom observations, and our surveys revealed what seemed to be some interesting ways in which administrators, teachers, and the students defined writing as it is done for creative writing classes versus the type of writing done for other writing courses. I found that creative writing classes seemed to be thought of as classes which allowed for writing which was both "fun" and "serious." It was fun because it wasn't the "required" writing which was supposed to be of help for other courses (the type of writing done in ENC 1102), yet it was "serious" because the teachers and the students, themselves, were already considering the students as "writers" or as "future writers." It seems to me that these definitions often created the differences in class structure which we observed in Ann Turkle's Imaginative Writing classroom.

Before I get more fully into these differences in course structure and definition, I would like to go into a brief description of the institutional history of the Imaginative Writing course at Florida State University.

According to John Fenstermaker, the Director of First-Year Writing from 1970-1982, Florida State University began to offer its second semester option of a creative writing course entitled Imaginative Writing for first-year students in 1974. FSU was at the time trying to build its creative writing program and wanted teaching options for its graduate students enrolled in this program. It was the feeling of Bonnie Braendlin, the Director of First-Year Writing from 1982-1990, that originally, those running the First-Year Writing Program preferred that students take Enc 1102, Writing about Literature. In fact, both Fenstermaker and Braendlin, thought that the department was concerned with students assuming that the Imaginative Writing course was easier and that students who enrolled in these sections were trying to duck the basic requirement. Therefore, the department created a requirement in 1984 which allowed only those students with a "C" or better in their first semester writing course to take imaginative writing. Braendlin stated that the department wanted to recruit better students who were serious about their writing for these courses.

Interesting enough, while FSU runs a teacher training program for the teaching of ENC 1101 and ENC 1102, the two courses traditionally required, it has no training program for teaching the Imaginative Writing courses. According to Braendlin, university English departments in general do not consider pedagogy important and, therefore, assume that teaching well is modeled by the faculty themselves. Jerry Stern, the Director of Creative Writing, echoes the idea that creative writing especially is modeled by faculty members who teach upper-level, creative writing workshops, such as he does, and I get the feeling that literature professors would echo his sentiment. It seems to me that the attitude of which Braendlin speaks suggests that those

who wish to teach are supposed to observe their professors, the master teachers, so that they too can become master teachers. It also seems to me that an assumption exists which suggests that those who can write "creative texts" of necessity know how to teach the writing of such texts. I am lead to such an assumption since the first-year imaginative writing courses were set up especially for graduate creative writers to teach and since no courses exist at FSU which deal with the pedagogy and theory of teaching creative writing.

So, what does inform the structuring of creative writing courses at the first-year level? In order to answer this question, I would like to look at how the four First-Year Imaginative Writing teachers we interviewed and Creative Writing Director Jerry Stern, who taught upper level creative writing courses only, described the creative writing classroom. First of all, Stern, Pat MacEnulty, and Craig Stroupe all thought that students enroll in a creative writing classroom because it is off the beaten path. In his interview with Amy Cashulette, Stroupe summed up what he considered the student reasoning as follows: There's this "giant bus, that's 1102 [writing about literature], and everybody's sort of being loaded on to it. Then you have this nice little sporty car with a few people in it-- which do you want to ride on?"

Almost all of the creative writing teachers we interviewed were also inclined to believe that students who enroll in imaginative writing courses are more serious about their writing. Both of these attitudes seemed to be born out in the mid-term survey which polled students in all of the teachers' courses. We found that not wanting to "ride the bus" so to speak accounted for 40% of the students' reasons for taking imaginative writing and that 36% had enrolled because they did enjoy creative writing/writing and thought they would get a chance to use their imagination. It does seem then that

these students are looking for alternatives to traditional writing classes and are more interested in what they see as creative writing.

Other views which informed the teaching of imaginative writing are as follows:

Mike Trammel and Pat MacEnulty both thought that students in these classes are more engaged, more emotionally committed.

Stroupe and Trammel both thought that these courses are more concerned with craft and technique. That they are more text-oriented, writing-oriented.

MacEnulty, Stern, and Alison Watkins talked about their students as young artists who are engaging in the art of writing. The idea which seems to surface here is that these imaginative writing courses deal with making art; the Writing about Literature courses do not.

Trammel also stated that these courses allow students the chance to write more meaningful "stuff," that they are less rigid than 1102, that they better accommodate student ideas, that more writing is expected, and that the writing is more difficult, more personal, closer to the heart.

And finally Stern stated that while creative writing teachers do not have to be creative writers, that they do need to be more sensitive to the delicate writing processes of creative writing students.

Our observations of Ann Turkle's classroom did show the above views associated with the structuring and the teaching of ENC 1142 at work. Ann Turkle ran what we decided to term an initiatory, maternal workshop. In other words, she did take on the role of master writer who helps the novice or apprentice learn the role of creative writer, and she did so in a supportive and affirming mode. In an interview, Turkle shared the feeling of the other

ENC 1142 teachers that her students were more emotionally engaged, and more serious about their writing than the ENC 1102 students she had taught in her past.

The concern with technique and craft mentioned by Stroupe and Trammel also seemed to be born out in Turkle's classroom. Two of the four texts that students might purchase for the class, Natalie Goldberg's *The Wild Mind* and David Kirby's *Writing Poetry*, were concerned with how to write and with how to generate writing. She also used Kirby's text to model the writing of poetry. On February 25, 1992, Kim Haimes Korn and I observed her directing students to look at some models in Kirby's book; she especially liked the list poem on page 52. Her other two texts, Tobias Wolf's *This Boy's Life* and Isabel Huggan's *The Elizabeth Stories*, were used to illustrate autobiography and fiction--their similarities and differences. In fact, a large part of Turkle's class was devoted to first generating 20 pages of autobiographical writing, workshopping it, and then later using much of this material so that it could be shaped into fiction and poetry. Turkle's stated purpose was to emphasize that all three genres shared similarities even though they were shaped by different concerns.

Turkle shared with Stern, MacEnulty, and Watkins the feeling that her students should be considered young "writers" or "artists." Our observations show that she liked to talk a lot about what "writers do." A course requirement was for students to attend a graduate reading of creative work at Finale's, a local bar and restaurant, and to attend a reading at the Spring Writers' Festival, which is hosted annually by FSU and run by Jerry Stern. Her reasoning was again that this is what writers do--they form a community. She also liked to talk about the workshops she had been in and the publishing

world. Again, she was showing what writers do--they participate in formal or informal workshops and attempt to publish their writing.

Turkle shared with Trammel the concern that students must write a lot. On her policy sheet under "Goals" she has written that "the student's job is to write a lot." Her first writing assignment was the autobiography assignment which asked students to produce, out-of-class, on average, five pages of material (type-written, double-spaced) for the first four weeks of class. It was clear, however, that Turkle's emphasis on twenty pages--five a week--was intended to tell students that writers write a lot, and that they write weekly, maybe even daily, not just in one rush.

Turkle also shared with Trammel the idea that the class structure should be less rigid. Although Turkle has a "Late Materials" policy, a "Paper Format" policy, and other policies which strongly structured her ENC 1102 course, she has no such policies for ENC 1142. It seems to me that the ENC 1142 policy sheet addresses students as though they are already invested in writing. There are no reminders of plagiarism, of bringing paper, pen and text to class, and of where students can go if they need additional help with their writing.

Finally, Turkle's initiatory, maternal class structure confirmed Stern's feeling that the teacher must be sensitive to the delicate creative writing process of the students. It seems to me that Stern, Trammel, and Turkle all believe that writing done for a creative writing workshop means more to the students--that it's "closer to the heart" as Trammel put it. Therefore, Turkle's policy for workshops was for students to concentrate on finding specific things that were working well in the writing they were examining. Again,

90% of the grade in this course concerned whether students had done their work, and she collected most of this work in three book-like portfolios consisting of a foreword followed by a table of contents followed by the students' writing. Turkle never put a grade on any single piece of writing. It seems to me that she wished the students to learn from the writing process and did consider it to be delicate.

Turkle's maternal initiatory workshop also confirmed that she, like most of the other teachers, was concerned with initiating students into what it means to be a creative writer and the language that creative writers use to describe their craft. I found that Turkle seemed to see her students as "future," publishing writers and her job was to introduce the students to the writer's world in as supportive manner as possible through the texts that she chose, through the type of writing done for the class, through the workshop atmosphere of the class itself, and through the outside activities such as attending readings.

It seems to me that all of the above views shape and define the Imaginative Writing course as something quite different from our traditional writing about literature course. Why are these two writing courses structured so differently? In an interview, Wendy Bishop, the director of first-year writing from 1990-1993, stated that as she has studied myths about writing, the commonalties in writing and creative writing [have] started to emerge. This statement seems important since many students and teachers at FSU seem to distinguish composition courses as utility courses--the bus they must ride--and creative writing courses as something "fun"--the sports car. I would like to close with the following questions:

If, indeed, there are commonalties, why are the courses defined and taught so differently?

Students seem to benefit from the ENC 1142 workshop since it encourages them to be writers, and treats their work as "art." Why don't we consider students in traditional courses as writers of art?

One of the reasons the Imaginative Writing courses were set up was so that graduate students in the creative writing program could teach "in field." Why would composition courses--writing courses also--be considered "out of field"?

Two or three of the creative writing teachers set up quite different course structures for their Writing about Literature courses vs. their Imaginatory Writing courses. One specifically thought ENC 1102 students benefited from grades on each paper, while the delicate process of creative writing called for portfolio grading--grades on collections of writing. Why should two writing classes which both serve as second-semester, first-year writing courses call for such different structures? Who is insisting that we make the structure of an ENC 1102 more rigid than that of an ENC 1142?

How much do our own attitudes and definitions of courses such as creative writing and writing about literature shape the student attitudes and definitions? Maybe we should question the model which assumes creative writing is more imaginative or the model which uses technique and craft to drive creative writing classes,

And finally how much do our societal myths concerning writing shape how we teach and grade creative writing? How much do these same myths label ENC 1102 "utility course" and shape how we teach and grade writing

done in this course? In other words, how much have our students been constructed by teachers of composition and creative writing?* **

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* Please see the following papers for more information on this study:

Korn, Kim Haimes. "Defining and Understanding Roles in the Creative Writing Workshop." NCTE Conference. Orlando, 1994.

Rogers, Elsie. "Building Layers: Guiding Student Writing Processes in the Expository Writing Classroom." NCTE Conference. Orlando, 1994.

Sewell, Donna N. "Creating Writers: Expectations in the Expository Writing Classroom." NCTE Conference. Orlando, 1994.

** The following three pages were used as handouts at the NCTE Conference and are helpful to understanding the study.

ENC 1142*
First-Year Imaginative Writing: Poetry, Fiction, Memoir
WRITING FROM LIFE

Texts: Wild Mind Natalie Goldberg
Writing Poetry David Kirby
This Boy's Life Tobias Wolf or
The Elizabeth Stories Isabel Huggan
Packet

Goals: The student's job in this class is to write a lot. The emphasis will be on generating material, not revising and polishing--on behaving like writers (e.g. writing), and not on the illusion that any one work is perfectible. Because this course emphasizes writing from the student's own experience, genre fiction (romance fantasy, mystery, sci fi) won't be accepted for the fiction portfolio. But, keep in mind, the basis for all good genre fiction is a mastery of the basic concepts of fiction writing. Uncovering our individual and shared criteria for "good" writing will be one of our goals this semester. I will be looking for serious, committed, honest work--which is not to say it can't be wild and funny. Good luck.

Grading:
Portfolio One--25% Autobiography and process journal
Portfolio Two--25% Five poems and process journal
Portfolio Three--25% Two stories and process journal
Remaining 25%--Class participation, peer editing, attendance and response for two readings, short author research assignment

Journal: contains beginnings and reflections on the writing process

* I have condensed and have moved text so that it can be more easily understood by the readers

ENC 1102*
Writing About Literature

Texts: Reading(s) Geoffrey and Judith Summerfield
Packet
Recommended: The Bedford Handbook

Course Objectives: To improve our understanding and competence as writers, readers and respondents. In order for this growth to take place, we will need to build a group of fellow writers who are willing to invest time in their own and others' work, writers who will commit themselves to the task of responding honestly and thoughtfully and who encourage rather then condemn risk taking. The goal of the course will also be to use assigned work in Reading(s), essay assignments and journal work to encourage each student to work toward person discoveries and self-knowledge acquired through writing.

Grading:
Portfolio: The student's portfolio will contain all essays and draft materials. I will assign a grade at midterm and again at the conclusion of the course.

Participation and preparation will account for 10% of the grade.

Journal: The journal is the key to the early process of responding to readings, shaping perceptions and developing ideas in preparation for exchanges with fellow students and the instructor. Questions provided by the instructor and the text will help you to focus your responses to reading and preparation for essay assignments. Failure to complete a journal will result in an F for the course.

* I have condensed and have moved text here also.

Compiled from Ethnography Study of Ann Turkle's Classrooms in 1992 and 1993.

Attendance: Six hours of absence are grounds for failure. You have three hours of "free" absences which should be used when you need them most. Absences beyond the three hour limit will have an impact on your grade.

Lateness: In a workshop class, attendance and promptness are critical to the best use of class time.

Participation: You will be asked to share responsibility for guiding the discussion of student work. It is critical that all students come to class having read and reread the work and are prepared and willing to offer insights and ask questions. Bring your journal to class every day. Be prepared to use class time to write either in response to short assignments or to continue your work in progress. Use this time well.

Partial Syllabus

Autobiography Assignment: In the last four-and-one-half pages of her policy sheet, Ann Turkle writes of the assignment, the purpose for the autobiography, prompts for generating material, and advice on how to write the autobiography.

Attendance: In a collaborative writing course like this, attendance is essential. You may take three absences without penalty, but I urge you to save them till you need them. Six hours of absence are grounds for failure in this course. There will be two required conferences. Failure to attend a conference is considered an absence.

Late Materials: It is essential that students meet deadlines for invention work, early and final drafts. Failure to do so will result in a lowered final grade.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unauthorized or unacknowledged use of someone else's work. Plagiarism is grounds for failure in this course.

Need Help?: Consult tutors in the READING/WRITING Center, 330 Williams. Call 644-6495 to arrange a help session. Be sure to take the piece of writing you're working on.

Please be sure to bring textbook, journal, paper and pen to every class.

Format For Essays: Try to type all drafts of your assignments. Rough drafts should be single spaced with double space between paragraphs, and good, wide margins. Finished drafts must be typed and should be double spaced, no cover page, name on each page.

First Day Writing Assignment: What is your first memory of writing? How old were you? What did you write? How did you like it? Who did you show it to? What did he/she say?

Compiled from Ethnography Study of Ann Turkle's Classrooms in 1992 and 1993.

Four TA's and the Creative Writing Director Voice Their Views Concerning Creative Writing Classrooms	**What We Saw in Turkle's Class And What We Learned Through The Survey**
1) Students enroll because it's off the beaten path. There's this "giant bus, that's 1102 [Writing about Literature], and everybody's sort of being loaded on to it. Then you have this nice little sporty car with a few people in it--which do you want to ride on?"	1) According to the mid-semester survey which polled students in the four TA's classes and in Ann Turkle's class, 40% of the students did enroll because they didn't want to "ride the bus." 36% enrolled because they did enjoy creative writing/writing and thought they would get a chance to use their imagination.
2) Students are more serious about their writing. Students are more engaged, more emotionally committed.	2) In an interview Ann Turkle echoed the feeling that her students were more emotionally committed and engaged.
3) The classes are more concerned with craft and technique. They are more text-oriented, writing-oriented.	3) Turkle's class was concerned with technique and craft. Natalie Goldberg's The Wild Mind and David Kirby's Writing Poetry were used to generate writing and to tell and to show students how to write. Her other two texts, Tobias Wolf's This Boy's Life and Isabel Huggan's The Elizabeth Stories were used to illustrate autobiography and fiction.
4) Students are young artists engaging in the art of writing.	4) Turkle liked to treat her students as writers or as "future writers of published work" She talked a lot about what writers do and about the activities they attend, such as readings.
5) Students can write more "meaningful stuff." More writing is expected, and the writing is more difficult, more personal, "closer to the heart."	5) Turkle stated in her policy sheet that "the student's job is to write a lot. The 25 page autobiography was to help students generate material on a weekly basis. Turkle felt that the writing was more personal and therefore 90% of the student's grade was based on completion of work.
6) Course structures are less rigid.	6) The structures in Turkle's class were less rigid. There were no "Late Materials" or "Format" policies, and even though there was an "Attendance Policy" I never saw Turkle take attendance.
7) The writing process of creative writers is more delicate; therefore, teachers need to be more sensitive.	7) Turkle ran a maternal, initiatory workshop which emphasized positive feedback.

Compiled from Ethnography Study of Ann Turkle's Classrooms in 1992 and 1993.